

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method for withdrawing a fluid sample from a patient, comprising the steps of:
 - a. providing a sampling device having a housing, a plunger and a needle having a sharpened tip for piercing the patient
 - b. collecting fluid from the patient in the housing;
 - c. retracting the needle into the plunger so that the sharpened tip of the needle is enclosed within the plunger ~~shielded~~ to prevent inadvertent contact with the sharpened tip; and
 - d. expelling the fluid from the housing after the sharpened tip of the needle is retracted into the plunger.
2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of expelling fluid comprises the step of displacing the plunger within the housing.
3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 comprising the step of sealing the fluid within the housing.
4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of retracting comprises the step of displacing the needle rearwardly into the housing while the collected fluid is in the housing.
5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 comprising the step of analyzing the collected fluid to determine a characteristic of the collected

fluid.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 5 comprising the step of analyzing the pH level of the collected fluid.
7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 5 comprising the step of analyzing the oxygen levels of the collected fluid.
- 8-13. (Canceled).
14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 comprising the steps of biasing the needle rearwardly and releasably retaining the needle against the rearward bias.
15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14 comprising the step of releasing the needle after the step of collecting fluid so that the needle is automatically retracted rearwardly by the a biasing element.
16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15 wherein the method comprises the step of displacing the plunger rearwardly, and the step of releasing the needle occurs in response to displacing the plunger rearwardly.
17. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15 wherein the device includes an actuator wherein the step of releasing the needle comprises manually operating the actuator.

18. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 comprising the step of maintaining the needle in a fixed axial position relative to the housing while a majority of the fluid is collected in the housing.
19. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the housing comprises a reservoir and the step of collecting fluid comprises collecting fluid in the reservoir and the step of expelling comprises expelling the fluid from the reservoir in the housing.
20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the housing comprises a port and the step of collecting comprises collecting fluid through the port and the step of expelling comprises expelling the fluid through the port.
21. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 comprising the step of venting air from the housing during the step of collecting fluid.
22. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the device includes a needle assembly comprising the needle and a hub having a first connector, and the housing comprises a second connector coöperable with the first connector, and the method comprises the step of connecting the first connector to the second connector.
23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22 comprising the step of removing the hub from the barrel prior to the step of expelling fluid from the housing.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the plunger comprises a piston and the method comprises the step of removing the piston from the plunger.
25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of expelling comprises expelling the fluid while the needle is retracted in the housing.
26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of collecting fluid comprises displacing the plunger rearwardly by the fluid pressure of the fluid being collected.
- 27-53. (Canceled).